

Chapter 15

Running a Trapline



Content Standard - *Students demonstrate an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to safely and responsibly harvest furbearing animals using best management practices*

Introduction

Your success on the trapline begins long before the season opens. Trappers need to obtain permission, scout properties, and prepare equipment before the opening day.



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Always ask for permission

Don't wait until trapping season opens to ask for permission



Explain the importance of obtaining permission to trap on private land before the season opens

Early summer is a good time to ask farmers and other landowners for permission to trap. During the spring, farmers are busy planting crops. In the fall, they will be busy again, preparing for the harvest.

Dress neatly when you ask a landowner for permission to trap. Be polite, even if the landowner denies your request.

When talking to landowners, ask about possible problems with too many furbearers, or neighbors who might want someone to trap their property. If you establish a reputation as a responsible trapper you may find that landowners will call you and ask you to trap problem furbearers.

Contact landowners again shortly before the season opens. Ask about other people, such as hunters, who may be using the property. Let landowners know the days and times you will be on their property, and the type of vehicle you plan to drive. Make sure they have your telephone number in case they need to reach you.

Obtaining permission early will give you plenty of time for pre-season scouting. When scouting or trapping, treat the property and the owner with respect.



Describe the advantages of pre-season scouting

During pre-season scouting trips find specific places to make your sets and plan the materials you need. Make notes of what you find and sketches of areas that look promising. This will allow you to set your traps out quickly when the season opens.

If you wait until the season opens to scout, it will be time-consuming and difficult to cover ground carrying your equipment. Scouting during the season may alert wary furbearers such as fox and coyotes. Pre-season planning allows you to make sets quickly and leave the area without creating much disturbance.



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Pre-season scouting leads to success

Check the Michigan Hunting and Trapping Guide for information on how often you are required to check your traps. Regardless of the law, responsible trappers will visit their live-restraining traps daily. It is good for animal welfare, and it will increase your success.

Why daily checks increase success!

- Less chance animals or traps will be stolen
- If traps have been disturbed you can remake the set
- Less chance for predation
- Less chance an animal will escape from a restraining device
- Less chance an animal will injure itself or damage its pelt
- If you remove an animal and set the trap again you may catch another one
- Most furbearers are active at night (nocturnal), so check your traps early each day



Make a commitment to check your traps on a regular basis

When you set out a trapline, you assume responsibilities. Animal welfare is a top priority. Most furbearers are nocturnal so it is best to check your live-restraining traps at first light each morning. If you cannot check them at daylight, check them as early in the day as possible. *Check the Michigan Hunting and Trapping Guide for current regulations on trap-checking requirements.*

One important difference between trapping and hunting is your commitment to work your trapline every day until you remove your traps. Hunters can choose the days they want to hunt, but trappers must check their sets on a regular basis. In some cases, traps must be checked on a daily basis. Again, *check the Michigan Hunting and Trapping Guide for current regulations.* Bad weather or other problems should not change your plans.

If you cannot personally fulfill your responsibility to wildlife and fellow trappers because of illness have another licensed trapper check your line. If a licensed friend or family member knows where your sets are located they can check or remove your traps for you. Keep notes and sketches showing where to find your traps.



State three or more reasons to check your traps early each morning

There are many good reasons to check your traps early each morning:

- Animal welfare

Running a Trapline



FWS Photo

Badger

Shooting Furbearers

Most trappers shoot animals in the head. Aim between the eyes and up a little for a brain shot. When you are certain the animal is dead, carry it a short distance away and lay it with its head downhill if possible. This will let it bleed out while you remake the set. Lay the animal on newspapers for the drive home. When skinning, you can wrap paper towels around the head and hold them with duct tape to contain any additional blood. Remove the towels after skinning and rinse off any blood with cold water. Hang the skin in front of a fan overnight to dry it.

Use selective trapping techniques to avoid catching pets

- Prevent escape from live-restraining traps
- Release non-target animals
- Reduce chances of fur or trap theft
- Reduce chances of predation on your catch
- Lets landowners and others know you are responsible
- Gives you time during the day or evening to skin or sell your fur
- Gives you time to remake sets

Animal welfare is the most important reason to check your traps early each morning.



Describe two ways to safely, quickly, and humanely dispatch a furbearing animal

There are various methods that may be used to dispatch trapped animals. The best method depends on the furbearer species, type of trap used, and the experience level of the individual trapper. Inexperienced trappers should focus on making selective water sets using submersion techniques or kill-type traps. This avoids the need to dispatch your catch.

Trappers who make land sets need to be able to safely and humanely dispatch animals, or release them. Inexperienced trappers should find a mentor who can teach them first-hand the most humane and effective methods of dispatching animals.

Generally, the best way to kill a trapped furbearer is to shoot it in the head with a .22 rifle. If the animal has bitten someone, or if rabies is suspected, choose a heart shot so that you do not damage the head. Health authorities may want to test the brain tissue for rabies. Always shoot skunks in the heart because the brain may harbor the rabies virus even if the skunk shows no signs of the disease. In Michigan, trappers are required to be graduates of hunter education courses in order to carry a firearm. They must follow all firearm safety rules on the trapline. In Michigan, you may not shoot a muskrat, beaver, otter, mink, fisher, or marten except under DNR permit; therefore, submersion techniques, kill-type traps, or other dispatch methods must be employed for these species.

If you are not legally permitted to carry a firearm on the trapline due to age



or other restrictions, you will have to use a different method. If possible, you should take someone (e.g., parent or guardian) that can carry a firearm to help you dispatch an animal. Once again, it is recommended that inexperienced trappers find a mentor who can show you how to quickly and humanely dispatch a trapped furbearer. Most furbearers can be humanely dispatched by first striking them at the base of the skull or the bridge of the nose with a heavy wooden or metal tool to dispatch or render them unconscious. If the animal is unconscious, pin the head with one foot and place your other foot over the heart and chest area and press down. Compressing these organs will lead to death. This method works best with smaller furbearers. This method is not recommended for skunk.

With both methods caution should be used to minimize the risk of getting bitten. Before approaching the animal, look at the trap, chain, and grapple/stake to ensure the animal is securely captured. Then approach quietly and slowly to minimize stress to the animal. This may help reduce the chance of the animal lunging away from your approach and causing unnecessary injury to the animal. Also note the length of the chain because an animal that is not normally aggressive can become so when approached.

Trappers must plan the method of dispatch prior to setting traps. Planning reduces stress on you and the furbearer.



Describe two ways to release a non-target animal from a foothold trap

Your personal safety is the top priority when you release an animal from a live-restraining trap. Your second priority is to release the animal without harming it. If you cannot do this on your own, get help. If you trap a lynx, cougar, or wolverine in Michigan, please contact your local wildlife biologist or call the Report All Poaching (RAP) line at 800-292-7800 as soon as possible. The DNR Wildlife Division will want to document the capture and may want to collect biological samples. The biologist or conservation officer will also be able to assist in the release of the animal.

The first step in releasing an animal is to restrain it without hurting it. Trapping equipment dealers sell catchpoles for this purpose. To use it, slip the noose over the animal's head and pull it down snugly so the animal cannot escape. Then you can use the pole to steer the animal's head away from the trap while you depress the levers or springs with your feet. When the animal's foot is free you can position yourself behind the animal and release the noose.

You should have no problems with birds of prey if you have properly covered



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Noosing a bobcat. Releasing a large animal, such as a bobcat, is difficult. Some trappers use a large piece of plywood with a notch cut in the side. Keep the plywood between you and the animal. Put the notch over the animal's leg, then release the trap.

Running a Trapline



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Use selective techniques to avoid pets. If you do catch a dog or cat, release it and notify the owner.

Your goal is to make a few good sets, not to make a lot of sets

Practice set construction before the season opens - practice makes perfect

flesh baits at your set. If by chance you do catch one of these birds examine it closely for injury. If the bird is injured contact a conservation officer or wildlife biologist for help getting it to a rehabilitator. If you can release the animal unharmed you should cover it with a blanket or coat while you depress the springs on your trap. Be extremely careful. Birds of prey have strong talons and beaks that can cause serious injury. Once the foot is free, remove the covering and allow the bird to fly away.

Do not attempt land trapping if you cannot safely and humanely release non-target animals.



Describe what to do if a domestic animal or a pet is caught in a foothold trap

If you catch a domestic animal, examine it for injury before releasing it. Although the animal may appear to be a pet, do not assume it will not bite. Carefully restrain any animal when you release it.

If a domestic animal is injured contact the owner or the landowner so they can take it to a vet for treatment. No one wants to lose an animal or have it live with a permanent injury that could have been prevented with prompt treatment. If you are worried about a dispute with the pet's owner, the landowner may be able to help you resolve it.



Compare the decision to make a few good sets for furbearers versus setting as many traps as possible

It is better to make a few good sets than to make many sets in a rush. Pre-season scouting and planning will help you make sets that have a high chance of success. If you rush your sets, they may be low quality and catch fewer furbearers. As you gain experience you can increase the number of traps you set.



Describe responsible fur handling procedures in the field and why it is important

Take great care handling your catch in the field. If an animal is wet and muddy, rinse it out in the cleanest water you can find. Remove the excess water by stroking the animal or gently shaking it. When you get the animal home, dry the fur as soon as possible.

Safety - Animal Welfare - Responsibility - Furbearer Conservation



When animals are trapped on land, keep them dry. Use a brush or comb to remove burrs or dirt.

Put any furbearers that are not bloody from shooting in a burlap bag or other protective cover. If an animal has fresh blood on its fur, lay it separately on newspaper or other material in the back of your truck or your car trunk. Be sure not to display animals in ways that may offend people who see them.

Care in the field shows respect for your harvest and it will make the skinning job go faster at home. Proper handling will help you get the best price for your fur.



State three reasons a trapper should keep a daily journal

It is a good idea to keep a journal. Over time, it will help you increase your catch and bring back many good memories. Make notes about the types of traps you use, how you make your sets, and how many animals you catch at a set before you remove it. Keep notes about different lures or baits you use. Soon your journal will help you know how to make your sets work the best during different parts of the season.

A journal is also a good place to keep sketches and information about your sets. Remember, sketches will help someone else find your traps if you get sick or cannot run your line.



Ohio DOW Photo

Rinse dirty animals in clean water

Three Reasons to Keep a Journal

- Increase your success
- Guide others to your traps if you get sick
- Save your memories to enjoy over the years